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The Older Adult

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Alcohol



ARF

Addiction
Research
Foundation

Fondation
de la recherche
sur la toxicomanie



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What Do You Know About Alcohol?



Alcohol in any form – beer, wine or spirits – is a drug. It acts on the nervous system and it can make a person feel more relaxed, talkative, sleepy or uncoordinated. It also reduces alertness, judgment and reaction time.

Although older adults generally drink less alcohol than younger adults, they are more sensitive to its effects. This is because their blood circulation, kidneys and liver work more slowly to eliminate alcohol, and their bodies contain less water to dilute alcohol. Women are generally smaller than men and have proportionally less water in their bodies to dilute alcohol, so they're more sensitive to alcohol's effects.



Be Careful

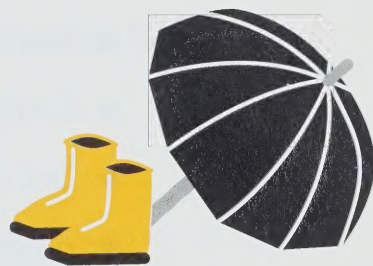
A small amount of alcohol is unlikely to harm a healthy adult, but it can worsen health conditions such as diabetes, heart or blood pressure problems, liver disease and stomach problems.

Some things mix, but alcohol and drugs don't!

Drinking any alcohol when you are taking medications for sleep problems, anxiety, pain, coughs or colds, allergies, high blood pressure, heart conditions, diabetes, infections or other conditions can result in:

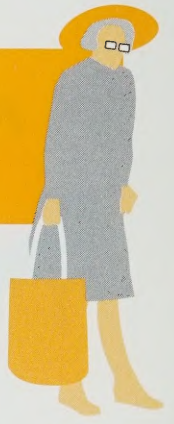
- ◆ medications not working effectively
- ◆ unsteadiness or falling
- ◆ feeling confused or not being able to concentrate
- ◆ drowsiness or daytime sleeping

- ◆ poor memory
- ◆ difficulty breathing
- ◆ dizziness
- ◆ nausea or vomiting
- ◆ headaches
- ◆ changes in heart rate
- ◆ irritability
- ◆ feeling jittery
- ◆ feeling down or “blue”
- ◆ loss of consciousness.



Interactions between alcohol and medications can be very serious. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about these interactions.

Signs of Harmful Drinking



Drinking alcohol can cause problems. Here are some warning signs:

- ◆ drinking greater amounts and more often
- ◆ drinking early in the day
- ◆ spending too much money on alcohol
- ◆ denying how much you're drinking
- ◆ gulping drinks
- ◆ keeping drinking a secret
- ◆ drinking to cope with loneliness or loss
- ◆ becoming confused
- ◆ forgetting things
- ◆ becoming anxious or depressed
- ◆ experiencing mood changes
- ◆ having problems sleeping
- ◆ falling or having accidents
- ◆ not eating properly
- ◆ losing weight and appetite
- ◆ deteriorating health



- ◆ neglecting yourself or your home
- ◆ conflict and withdrawal from family and friends
- ◆ medication not working effectively.

If you have any of these warning signs, it's best to drink less or stop. Consider talking to your family doctor, another professional or someone else who can help.



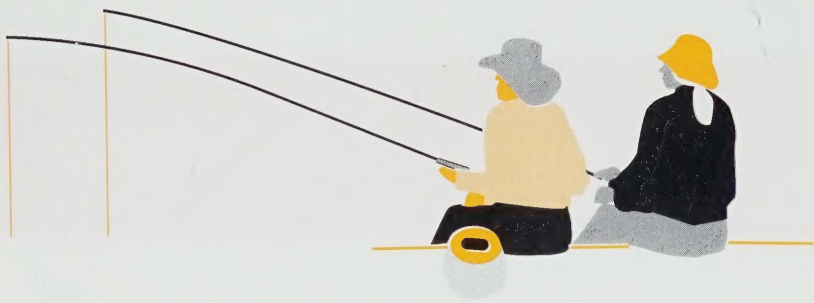
Some of the warning signs of harmful drinking are often mistaken for signs of getting older.

Some Guidelines for Sensible Drinking



- ◆ Use alcohol wisely: to accompany a **special** meal; to celebrate a **special** occasion; to relax in the company of friends and family; or to add enjoyment to a social gathering.
- ◆ Don't use alcohol to help you sleep, relieve pain or cope with loneliness, stress or uncomfortable feelings.
- ◆ If you notice you are drinking more over time, drink less or stop.
- ◆ If you have a history of alcohol problems, or a serious medical or memory problem, it may be better not to drink at all. Ask your doctor or an addictions professional for advice.





- ◆ If you are taking prescribed or over-the-counter medication, don't drink any alcohol until you have spoken with your pharmacist or your doctor. Mixing alcohol with other drugs can be harmful.
- ◆ Don't drink and drive a car, snowmobile or power boat. Don't drink and use power tools, household appliances or other machinery.
- ◆ If alcohol is beginning to cause problems or you feel uneasy or intoxicated, even while staying within the guidelines below, drink less or stop. Consider talking to your family doctor, another health professional, or someone else who can help.

Stay Within These Limits

If you choose to use alcohol:

- ◆ Don't drink daily
- ◆ Drink fewer than eight standard drinks* a week
- ◆ Drink no more than one to two standard drinks* a day for women
- ◆ Drink no more than two to three standard drinks* a day for men
- ◆ Keep track of the number of drinks you consume each week.

* One standard drink



12 oz. regular beer



5 oz. wine



1.5 oz. spirits

Alternatives



You can manage your affairs more easily and enjoy life with appropriate use of medications or alcohol. Here are some healthy alternatives to help you sleep, deal with pain, overcome stress or cope with loneliness.



When you can't sleep

- ◆ make your bedroom more comfortable
- ◆ treat yourself to a warm bath
- ◆ have a glass of warm milk
- ◆ avoid caffeine, other stimulants or spicy foods after 4 p.m.
- ◆ avoid alcohol in the evening
- ◆ get up and do something until you feel sleepy
- ◆ avoid regular daytime napping
- ◆ listen to relaxing music.

When you feel anxious or tense

- ◆ try moderate exercise





- ◆ talk with a friend
- ◆ do relaxation exercises
- ◆ play your favorite music
- ◆ start a flower garden.

When you have a cold or stuffy nose

- ◆ drink lots of fluids
- ◆ rest
- ◆ use extra pillows to keep your head up
- ◆ gargle with warm salt water for a sore throat
- ◆ increase the humidity in your home.

When you are in pain

- ◆ try exercise, massage, or cold or hot compresses to help reduce some types of pain
- ◆ ask your doctor about non-drug treatments.





When you feel lonely

- ◆ go where there are people
- ◆ phone a friend or write a letter
- ◆ become a volunteer – you have a lot to offer
- ◆ pursue a hobby or take a class.

To stay healthy

- ◆ be active – enjoy the outdoors
- ◆ go for a walk, keep a garden, golf or swim
- ◆ learn some stretching exercises
- ◆ join an exercise class
- ◆ mall-walk with a friend
- ◆ practise deep breathing with music you enjoy
- ◆ drink lots of water (up to eight glasses a day)



- ◆ eat less fat, sugars, fast food and meats, and eat more whole grain products, vegetables and fruits
- ◆ try herbal teas, hot water with lemon, or fruit juices, instead of coffee, tea and cola
- ◆ have a friend over to share good and bad times and to talk things over
- ◆ if life is getting you down, talk with a family member, religious leader, counsellor or friend
- ◆ focus on your accomplishments and the good things in your life.



**IN YOUR LATER YEARS, YOUR HEALTH CAN DETERMINE
WHAT YOU CAN DO, SO STAY HEALTHY.**

The Older Adult and Alcohol

